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U.S. Sees Chad as a Portent of Qaddafi's Ambition

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 18 — Reagan Administration officials said today that they regarded the conflict in Chad as a major test of wills with Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan leader. They assert that Colonel Qaddafi had made no effort to disguise his plan of controlling Chad and of eventually unifying all African Moslems under the Libyan banner.

Because of the Libyan's declared goal of a greater Islamic state and his disdain for the independent African countries created from former European colonies, the Administration deems the situation in Chad very serious.

Officials said today that if Colonel Qaddafi, working through Goukouni Oueddei, former President of Chad, was able to overthrow the Government of Hissen Habré, the likely result would be problems for nations such as the Sudan, Niger, Nigeria, Egypt, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Senegal, all of which are pro-Western and all of which feel, in varying degrees, threatened by Libya.

'We Are Coming to a Crunch'

"I guess you could say we are coming to a crunch," one Administration official said. "Qaddafi may try to push on further south, or he might be planning to partition Chad and avoid a battle with the French, but even that would be unacceptable to us and to everybody else since that would permanently destabilize Chad and put Libyan troops right on the western borders of the Sudan."

"American policy is for Libya to get out of Chad," he said. "The Libyans should not be in Chad. We have to show the Libyans they cannot win in Chad. We also have to do what we can to get the Africans united in pressing Qaddafi out."

Colonel Qaddafi has sent troops into Chad before, but each time was prevailed upon to withdraw, most recently in 1981, when by a twist of history, Mr. Goukouni, then President, asked him to pull his forces out.

Mr. Goukouni, however, lost out several months later in a power struggle with Mr. Habré, a former colleague from northern Chad who turned against him many years ago.

The United States at one time backed Mr. Habré with Central Intelligence Agency funds when he was operating out of the Sudan and Libyan forces were in Chad.

But when the Libyans departed, the United States urged him not to continue his civil war with Mr. Goukouni, and instead work toward unifying Chad, a senior Administration official said. Mr. Habré rejected this advice.

Mr. Goukouni then fled Chad and made his way to Libya once again to seek help from Colonel Qaddafi. Early this year, American and French intelligence noticed large-scale movements of troops and equipment toward Libya's border with Chad.